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26 October 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Report of Task Force on Vietnam Data and Trend
Indicators

SUMMARY

During the week of 9 - 13 October, an interagency working group reviewed data used to measure trend in the war in Vietnam. The group concluded that the data most frequently used for both internal and public purposes are not adequate for the task and recommends that a special interagency task force be established to systematically develop new ways of measuring progress.

The group believes that indicators of trends should measure results toward broad objectives, not the progress of individual programs, or simply activities associated with our programs. Effective indicators of progress will come only from a systematic interagency analysis of statistics, reports, and candid assessments by people experienced in South Vietnam. Moreover, the group strongly believes that Vietnam is so diverse that as much indicator data as possible should be analyzed on a district and province basis in order to determine whether trends shown in countrywide data reflect wide-spread change, or simply changes in small areas of intense activity.

In the short term, the group recommends that efforts be undertaken immediately to: (1) improve the current indicator charts, (2) develop additional indicators from the Hamlet Evaluation System, (3) explore other potential indicators of trends (such as road and waterways control, provincial price indices, etc.), and (4) prepare monthly narrative statements on progress which cannot be portrayed statistically. Results of these tasks should be furnished as they become available, and a comprehensive report submitted on December 4, 1967.

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In the medium range, the group concluded that improved measurements of RVNAF effectiveness and VC military potential should be developed and that periodic soundings of Vietnamese attitudes should be provided to complement other indicators. Existing data are not adequate to measure RVNAF effectiveness and the group recommends that detailed data requirements be developed and discussed with the US Mission and the GVN. On the other hand, a system for measuring the impact of friendly operations and programs on enemy military potential probably can be developed in Washington by relating various individual indicators to each other on a systematic basis (e.g., activities, and reported condition of VC/NVA forces). Vietnamese opinion could be sampled by development of opinion polls and by use of various collection mechanisms. These efforts should begin now, with data requirements and proposed programs to be reported on December 4, 1967. A report of substantive results should be provided on January 30, 1968, with interim results reported as they become available.

The long term objective of all the foregoing efforts should be to develop a small number of credible measurements which can be presented in a clear, concise manner. The ideal would be a single "Dow Jones" index of how the war is going, but such an index is not currently feasible. It is likely, however, that substantial progress toward such a balanced group of valid indicators can be made if the foregoing actions are undertaken with sufficient priority and allocation of resources.

The group recommends that: (a) action assignments and suspense dates be established as indicated in the text below; (b) that the results be monitored by a special interagency task force, which will report periodically beginning on 4 December; (c) interim results of all efforts be provided as they become available; and (d) that plans be made now to brief MACV and the US Embassy in Saigon not later than 15 December 1967.

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1. During the week of 9 - 13 October, representatives of Ambassador Leonhart's office, the Department of State (INR), CIA, and the Department of Defense (DIA, JCS, OASD/Systems Analysis) reviewed data currently used to measure trends in the war in Vietnam. The group concluded that the data most frequently used to measure progress for both official and public purposes are not adequate for the task and recommends that a special interagency task force be established to systematically develop new ways of measuring trends in the war in all its facets.

2. The group focussed on four major aspects of the problem:

a. The current state of the art -- existing data and presentational forms;

b. Short-term add-ons -- additional data and charts that could be developed for early use;

c. Long-term add-ons -- developing an optimum system for measuring trends in the war; and

d. Specific recommendations for courses of action necessary to implement the group's findings on the first three items.

3. Current State of the Art

Discussions of indicators of trends tend to confuse such indicators with criteria for program evaluation. An indicator tells if we are winning (or losing) and measures significant trends; it does not measure program activities. Thus, a progress indicator may be quite independent of US or GVN programs, and may not correlate with particular programs. (For example, province price indices or the price of the piaster in world markets could be indicators. Conversely, the recruitment rate for RD cadre may have little relation to real progress.) In short, the group believes that indicators of progress should measure movement with respect to broad objectives, not with

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regard to individual programs. Progress indicators, furthermore, should not be confused with indices of activity associated with the implementation of our programs.

4. Several kinds of data, systematically analyzed by several types of analysts, are needed to develop the required indicators. Statistical data is a basic starting point because it can show trends and help define base points and end points. However, statistics by themselves, particularly those from Vietnam, present their problems: reports from several sources often do not agree, gaps exist, results are sometimes faked, reporting systems are frequently changed, and reporters often are not objective. Thus, narrative reports embodying the judgment of qualified field observers also must be used to help the analyst understand the trends in the statistics and help to highlight the biases and inadequacies of various data series. In addition, field visits by Washington observers and detailed "off the record" sessions with returning officials from all echelons are both necessary. Thus, effective indicators of progress will come only from a systematic analysis of statistics, reports, and candid assessments by people with experience in SVN.

5. Moreover, the group felt strongly that Vietnam is so diverse that the data used for indicators should be analyzed on a district and province basis wherever possible in order to determine whether trends shown in country-wide data represent pervasive, widespread change, or simply reflect changes in small areas where activity is intense.

6. The committee reviewed the commonly used statistical indicators, including VC/NVA attacks, VC/NVA incidents (sabotage, terrorism and harassment), VC/NVA defections, VC/NVA confirmed combat strengths and VC/NVA weapons losses. It concluded that some of the statistical indicators are helpful in assessing trends which may reflect progress, but are usually presented without the explanations needed to put them in proper context. Moreover, there is little or no systematic effort to analyze enemy documents or to use systematic reports of US field officials in conjunction with the statistics.

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7. In examining data showing VC/NVA incidents, for example, the committee found that changes in reporting criteria can have a drastic effect on the trends shown in the graphs currently used as indicators. The VC attacks graph shows a high level of attacks during 1962 and 1963, a drop from 1964 through mid-1966, followed by a substantial increase. However, the high level of attacks in 1962 - 1963 probably results from counting many harassing fire and other lesser incidents as attacks. In similar fashion, about 25% of the increase in total attacks during 1967 results from reporting mortar incidents as attacks even if no assault occurred; before that, mortar attacks without assault were counted as harassing fire. As with population control and enemy strength statistics, a retrospective set of data is required to show the trend accurately.

8. The committee concluded that the current state of the indicator art was inadequate and that a comprehensive action program should be initiated, with full participation of all appropriate agencies (State, DOD, (JCS, DIA, OASD/SA) CIA, White House). The program should include the short term, medium range, and long term efforts indicated below.

9. Short-Term Actions

The group felt that an effort should be made to improve charts in current use to the extent feasible. For example, a retrospective incident line should be developed along with guidelines for interpreting the data. This effort should be started immediately with results furnished as they become available. (Primary action: DIA; Participant: CIA; Suspense: November 1967)

10. On the basis of short term analysis, we must develop additional statistical indicators from data currently available. The Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), for example, has not yet been fully exploited. Analysis of the HES is likely to provide some indicators of GVN effectiveness, hamlet security, and the willingness of the people to commit themselves to the GVN by moving from VC areas to GVN secured hamlets and urban areas. Data series based on some of these indicators will complement and amplify the overall population control picture presented by the HES, and should provide a useful add-on to the current charts. (Primary action: DOD/Systems Analysis; Participant: JCS, DIA, CIA; Suspense: 28 November 1967)

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11. In addition to the HES data, the committee agreed it must explore data on other potential indicators of progress, such as road control, provincial price indices, rice harvest and distribution, neutralization of base areas, refugee resettlement, and movement of enemy units away from populated areas, in an effort to develop valid indicators. (Primary action: DOD/Systems Analysis; Participants: JCS, DIA, CIA, State; Suspense: 28 November 1967.)

12. It was agreed that a monthly list of narrative statements should be developed, similar to that prepared by CIA in September, of those factors which cannot be portrayed statistically, but which demonstrate real progress. Such narrative statements, covering a variety of political, economic and military factors, can be gleaned from existing periodic field reports, and would highlight trends in areas related to specific US aims and purposes. These would include political development, popular attitudes, Free World support, anti-corruption activities, land reform, Viet Cong morale problems, reflections of VC logistical difficulties, etc. This effort should be systematized, so that an overall checklist can be developed against which incoming reports can be scrutinized, with pertinent data summarized. Charts should be developed as feasible to illustrate individual items, although this series will not always produce recurring data and must remain flexible. (Primary action: CIA; Participants: State, DIA; Suspense: 1 November and monthly thereafter.)

13. Medium-Range

The group concluded that two broad areas for which better measurement could be developed are those related to Viet Cong military potential and RVNAF effectiveness. Data Measurement Systems for these factors, together with the HES, would provide complementary analytical and management tools covering a broad spectrum of US objectives in Vietnam. The group agreed, however, that substantial research using existing data was necessary, and that additional data might be required before any meaningful new systems could be implemented.

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14. The group agreed that existing data clearly were not adequate for developing a meaningful measurement of RVNAF effectiveness as an indicator of trends. Detailed data on RVNAF deployments, missions and operational units will be required to facilitate research and permit an effective evaluation. Data requirements on this subject should be developed in coordination with the US Mission in Saigon and the GVN. (Primary action: JCS; Participants: DIA, CIA, DOD/Systems Analysis; Suspense: 28 November 1967.)

15. The group agreed that a system for measuring the impact of friendly operations and programs on enemy military potential probably can be developed by relating various individual indicators to each other on a systematic basis. In this effort, we should discern the relationship between VC/NVA incident data and the data reported in the Hamlet Evaluation System. In turn, those data should be related to order of battle strength and location data for VC/NVA and friendly forces. In addition, friendly operations data should be examined in conjunction with VC activity and HES data to determine the impact of friendly activities and their probable long term effect. Because of uncertainties regarding the meaningfulness of potential combinations, we cannot now envisage the precise form this measurement may take. In any event, all relationships should be checked carefully against a comprehensive analysis of the non-statistical data in US/GVN reports and VC documents. (Primary action: CIA; Participants: OSD/Systems Analysis; JCS, DIA; Suspense: 15 January 1968.)

16. The long term objective of all the foregoing efforts should be to develop a small number of credible measurements which can be presented in a clear, concise manner. The ideal would be a single "Dow Jones" index of how the war is going, but such an index is not currently feasible. It is likely, however, that substantial progress toward a balanced group of valid indicators can be made if the foregoing actions are undertaken with sufficient priority and allocation of resources. Interim results which would provide individual useful indicators of progress will be made available as the research effort progresses.

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